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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a new spiral-ecological approach to counselor supervision, founded on the basis of a collaborative and facilitative relationship aimed at the promotion of skills acquisition, cognitive development, and personal growth. A brief review of the literature summarizes trainee, site, and supervisor factors that influence training programs, as well as goals and methods of supervision. Four principles of an ideal model of supervision are outlined: (1) responsivity (inclusion of trainee in outcome and evaluation); (2) a systems viewpoint (regard for trainee, site, and supervision factors); (3) a process orientation (helping trainees develop their own approaches to assessment, intervention, evaluation); and (4) spiral cycling (allowing for continual feedback and modification of techniques, responding to the development and changing objectives of the supervisor). The Spiral-Ecological Approach (SEAS) is described as using three processes: needs assessment; delivery of services, i.e., use of a variety of supervision techniques based on the results of the needs assessment; and evaluation, which includes two processes, informal and formal, both of which are formatively focused. Applications of the SEAS are possible for differing levels of counselor skill in a wide variety of settings. (JAC)

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A SPIRAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUPERVISION

(SEAS)

by

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CG 016871

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A SPIRAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUPERVISION (SEAS)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a new Spiral-Ecological approach toward counselor supervision. The model is founded on the basis of a collaborative and facilitative relationship aimed at the promotion of skills acquisition, cognitive development, and personal growth. The Spiral-Ecological Approach to Supervision (SEAS) utilizes three processes, needs assessment, delivery of services, and evaluation, which form a continual spiral. This spiral ascends toward enhanced professional competency and can be applied to counselors with differing levels of skill in a wide variety of settings.

A SPIRAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUPERVISION (SEAS)

The purpose of counselor education is the training of competent helpers who can facilitate individual and social change. Extensive reading of theories of counseling and psychotherapy has limited value unless it is integrated into an experiential learning process (Egan, 1982). During supervision, students learn by exposure to an experienced person who aids them in the development of the applied integration of psychotherapeutic skills, knowledge, and concepts. Thus, the job of the supervisor is to provide technical assistance toward the development of competent helpers (Tracy, 1978).

Proposals for new models of supervision should be based on the results of extensive research in the area. The following brief review of the literature summarizes some of these findings.

Trainee, Site, and Supervisor Factors:

Trainees bring differing levels of skill to their training programs. Truax and Carkhuff reviewed literature which indicates that counselors who demonstrate high levels of empathy, positive regard, genuiness and concreteness are more facilitative of constructive client change. Trainee's also differ in their level of theoretical knowledge (Perry, 1975; Stone & Vance, 1976) and in their level of social skills, physical appearance, intelligence, and openness to feedback. Additionally, the trainees' attitudes toward helping and their perception of the counselor's role may impede or aid their progress (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979).

Site factors are also critical to the supervision process and content. Each setting varies in its opportunities to perform counseling functions.

For example, a student located in a mental health clinic will have a different experience than one working in a career center. Moreover, the personality, attitudes, and professional views of the site personnel will have a large effect on the trainee (Boyd, 1978).

The supervisor completes the triangle. Sedduck and Bernard (1980) review studies which support the importance of supervisors offering high levels of "facilitative conditions" during supervision. Other recent studies have focused on the quantity and quality of supervisor feedback (Peters, Cormier, & Cormier, 1978; Worthington & Roehlke, 1979), and on the match between supervisor and trainee cognitive styles (Handley, 1982).

Goals and Methods of Supervision

Several reviews of supervision have divided the goals and methods of supervision into three categories: a) Personal-emotional development; b) Learning of practical skills; and c) Cognitive assessment. These correspond to the trainee's affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions (Bochnik, 1971; Brammer & Wassmer, 1977; Leduk & Bernard, 1980).

Techniques that aim to promote personal-emotional development focus on emotional more than intellectual aspects of the trainee's experience and maximize forces for change while minimizing the accompanying anxiety (Altucher, 1967). Patterson (1963) described supervision as a process which lies between teaching and therapy. Recently, Heppner & Handley (1981) reformulated this position with their idea that specific skills learning is secondary to increased awareness and engagement into an inter- and intra-personal process.

Methods employed to work on personal-emotional development include discussion of clinical cases and the use of audio- or video-tape recordings (Carlson, 1980). These offer an opportunity for the student to look at

patterns of behavior and grow from self-confrontation. Other techniques which can contribute to personal-emotional development are role-playing and psychodrama (Errek & Randolf, 1982).

Techniques that aim at learning practical skills are based on the assumption that the difference between effective and ineffective counseling depends upon specific therapist behaviors. Ivey (1971) proposed a training model which includes the steps of description, modeling, discrimination, practice, and feedback. The steps can be used in learning new skills and/or in helping supervisees critique their own work. Several studies have supported the effectiveness of a "microcounseling" approach with the teaching of interviewing skills, i.e. attending behavior, reflection of feeling, and paraphrasing (Ivey, 1971).

Kagan (1975) devised another method in this area. He labelled it Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) and its predominant strength is that it provides an avenue for obtaining information directly from clients. This is particularly effective in group supervision because the counselor and client can be interviewed at the same time which offers the counselor direct feedback. Research on the usefulness of the IPR approach has been only moderately supportive but it appears that it can be employed as a useful technique, given the right equipment and a competent inquirer (Brammer & Wassmer, 1977; Peters, Cormier, & Cormier, 1978).

The third goal of supervision is the teaching of clinical assessment procedures (Choca, 1980). Methods which focus on this goal are didactic presentation of personality and learning theory (O'Toole, 1979; Perry, 1975), and group process of clinical presentations (Boyd, 1978). The goal of developing clinical assessment expertise often involves instruction and use of psychological tests (Korchin, 1976) and intensive training in psychopathology (Matarazzo, 1978).

Ideal Models of Supervision:

Overemphasis on any of the above goals and methods results in a lack of comprehensive training. For example, the "Supervision as the Development of Clinical Assessment Skills Approach" assumes the existence of precise disorders with specific treatment interventions implied. The supervisor interacts in a didactic mode to instruct the trainee. This approach underplays the importance of counseling as a process.

An exclusive focus on the personal-emotional development of supervisees contributes to their personal awareness and the ability to communicate that to clients. However, a lack of clinical assessment and pracitcal skills diminishes the potential range of appropriate options for specific clients with specific problems.

Similarly, the overuse of "Supervision as the Learning of Practical Skills" has restricted applicability to the training of novice-level practitioners. It would not be appropriate to counselors who are more highly developed (Stoltenberg, 1981).

Ideal models of supervision should provide a framework for the intergration of the three basic goals and their accompanying methods, yet retain the flexibility to respond to variations in the supervisee's experience and level of development. Ideal models of supervision should also be instructive, yet rely on student input into the determination of outcomes. Finally, ideal models of supervision should focus on formative rather than summative evaluation, and should include a constant realignment of methods to goals.

THE S.E.A.S. MODEL

The Spiral-Ecological Approach to Supervision (SEAS) represents an attempt to incorporate all the key components of an ideal model of supervision. Specifically, it relies on four principles. These are:

1) Responsivity: A pre-planned, static approach to counselor training can not maximally utilize the varying needs and experiences of supervisees. Inclusion of trainee input into outcomes and evaluation leads to enhanced professional growth via the use of all the factors relevant to treatment in any setting.

2) Systems Viewpoint: Research has demonstrated that trainee, site, and supervisor factors affect the success of supervision (Brammer & Wassmer, 1977). Restricting supervision to the trainee's interactions with the client without due regard to the constraints and resources of the site ignores this fact.

3) Process Orientation: Research on supervision has focused on end-product changes, .e.g increases in facilitative skills or theoretical knowledge. This contrasts sharply with a process orientation in which the goal is to collaboratively help trainees develop their own approaches to assessment, intervention, and evaluation. To extend this notion, the supervisor's role in the S.E.A.S. Model is a consultant and resource person, not as an expert who can provide the "correct" answers. The major benefits of such a process orientation are that trainees learn a method of relying upon themselves, and they learn how to effectively utilize future supervisors in professional situations.

4) Spiral Cycling: Most of the current approaches are linear and follow an "effects" idea wherein supervisor does A, then trainee gains B. This does not allow for the continual feedback and respective modification of technique that is necessary for incorporating and responding to the development and changing objectives of the supervisee.

Components of the Model:

The S.E.A.S. Model can be broken down into three components: a) Needs Assessment; b) Delivery of Services; and c) Evaluation. Each stage leads

to the next in a triangular manner. For example, the needs assessment is followed by delivery of services and then evaluation, which leads to a new needs assessment, and the next cycle. The concept of a spiral refers to the fact that the revised needs assessment will elicit different needs but that the final goal, the development of an applied integration of psychological skills and knowledge in the service of clients, remains the same. So, in every cycle of the spiral there may be different goals formulated, different supervision techniques implemented, interactions attempted, and different outcomes from the evaluations conducted, but all processes are directed towards the development of the trainee. Figure 1 shows a visual presentation of the S.E.A.S. Model.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Needs Assessment: This consists of both formal and informal assessment procedures. The assessment process starts at the beginning of the supervision relationship. Since most trainees have had limited experience in controlling their own learning, it is important that they be introduced to the central ideas and advantages of this type of model. Many students would likely be frustrated without such an introduction, for research demonstrates that trainees look upon their supervisors as teachers (Glass, Gottman & Shmurak, 1976; Richardson & Stone, 1981). It should be expected that students may require guidance through several sessions before this style of supervision becomes adequately incorporated. Needs assessment consists of both formal and informal procedures.

Informal needs assessments can be conducted continually throughout the supervisory sessions. For example, questions, feedback, and supervisor self-disclosure can all serve to help the trainee define areas for exploration,

brainstorming, and decision-making. Formal needs assessments work as an adjunct to this informal process. The use of audio- or videotape in the training period is especially useful for defining goals and for identifying alternative responses (Carlson, 1980; Robinson, Froehle, & Kurpius, 1979; Stone, 1975).

Delivery of Services: Depending upon the goals generated by the needs analysis, a variety of supervision techniques such as exploration of counselor role, generation of alternative interventions, client conceptualization, feedback on skill use, information sharing, and site analysis can be utilized. The important point about delivery of services is that it is completely determined by the goals generated in the needs assessment activity which, in turn, elicits outcomes for formative evaluations. It would be expected that students will differ in the issues with which they need to work and the amount of time they need to devote to them. Also, most students will introduce personal and site difficulties as well as clinical issues.

Evaluation: This involves two processes, informal evaluation and formal evaluation, both of which are formatively focused. Informal evaluation activities should occur in each session. It raises these questions: Have we discussed this issue? Where do we go from here? What are you going to try next time? Should we look at how your needs are interfering here? The purpose of this evaluation is to measure progress toward the goals specified by preceding needs assessment activities. Furthermore, the information uncovered is included in the next needs assessment.

Formal evaluation provides an organized structure for the trainee to receive feedback from the supervisor and/or practicum instructor, and, as such, it should occur periodically throughout the training period. It is important that the procedures of this evaluation be worked out collaboratively for two

reasons. First, evaluation has been shown to be anxiety-producing and having some control of it is likely to reduce some of the anxiety (which might otherwise interfere with learning). Second, the SEAS model is based on a large degree of supervisee-supervisor cooperativeness in movement toward a shared goal. The lack of control of formal evaluation might be damaging to this style of collaboration. Both informal and formal evaluations are an integral part of the spiral model. Without these, further needs assessments become difficult and inaccurate. In addition, the use of evaluation in supervision offers a model for similar processes in therapy.

CONCLUSION

Even after years of use and experimentation, the process of supervision remains much of a mystery. The review of the research presented at the beginning of this paper supported the importance of collaborative and facilitative relationship and the success of a combination of skills building, clinical assessment, and personal growth as positive goals in this process. Since overemphasis on any of the three major approaches to supervision results in a lack of comprehensive training, there is need for a more eclectic and responsive system. The Spiral Ecological Approach to Supervision (SEAS) represents such a system. It rests on three processes: needs assessment, delivery of services, and evaluation; which form a continual spiral that ascends toward enhanced professional competency. If successful, the supervisees will carry on this process within themselves and will transfer the skills of mutual goal setting and evaluation to their own clinical work.

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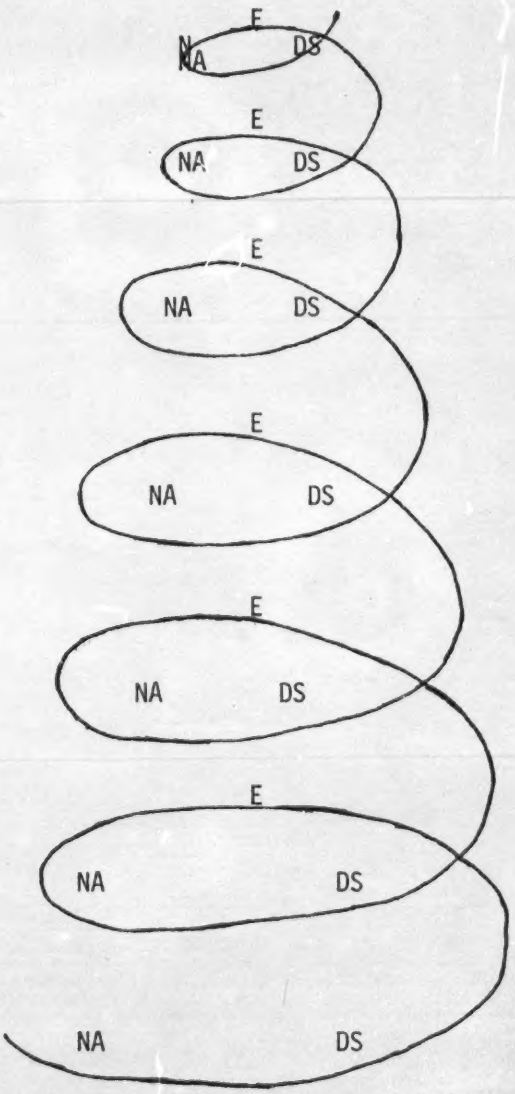
Figure 1

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE S.E.A.S MODEL

E = Evaluation
Informal Procedures
Formal Procedures



NA = Needs Assessment
Entry
Informal Procedures
Formal Procedures

DS = Delivery of Services
Skills Building
Personal Exploration
Cognitive Development
Site Analysis